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Feminist Criticism of Classical Rhetorical Texts: A Case Study of Gorgias' *Helen*

by Susan Biesecker

Despite the diversity of claims feminist scholars of antiquity advance, they share at least one preoccupation: the critique of patriarchy. That is, they challenge "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women" (Lerner 239) enacted in primary and secondary texts.¹ The particular methods by which they make their critiques of women's subjugation vary as much as their claims, but most can be classified into one of two categories according to their broad interests in woman as a reader or as a writer of classical texts. Using Elaine Showalter's classifications, for example, we can group most of this scholarship under one of two headings: "feminist criticism" or "gynocritics" (128). Essays that concern themselves "with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of sexual codes" (128) could fall under "feminist criticism." On the other hand, studies that pertain to "woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women" (128) better fit in the category of "gynocriticism."² Both types of scholarship help to dismantle patriarchy's hold on us, the former by showing how primary texts produced or perpetuated domination by men, the latter by recovering the significant contributions women made to ancient societies. Yet neither type of criticism suffices to critique patriarchy from within the Western rhetorical tradition.

Feminist criticism will not do because it is as yet limited to ideological critique. Although the essays grouped under this category produce long overdue histories of women in antiquity, their conclusions tend to reinforce the necessity of patriarchy in ancient societies. For instance Mary R. Lefkowitz's essay "Influential Women" provides a critique of analyses that would have us believe in the possibility of societies dominated by women or celebrate the "extraordinary achievements of a few women, as if they set a pattern that twentieth-century women could emulate

and revive, and finally bring into full realisation" (49). Asking us to recognize the subjugation of women in ancient societies, she argues that "women take political action only under certain closely defined conditions, and that unless they do so at least ostensibly on behalf of a male relative, they and others around them come to a bad end" (49). Other examples of this kind of approach include investigations into the origins of patriarchy in ancient Greece (Arthur), descriptions of the limited roles in which women were positioned (Pomeroy), or analyses of the power of myth to legitimize misogyny (Zeitlin). These instances of feminist criticism oblige students of antiquity to take seriously the way in which our Western tradition subjugated women of antiquity. Yet they offer no way for us to think our way out of patriarchy. Indeed, by securing patriarchal practices or the origins of patriarchy in a distant past, these studies reinforce patriarchy's hold on us today.

Seeking to challenge the way in which feminist criticism tends to represent women in antiquity as victims of patriarchy, gynocriticism directs our attention to the ways in which women in ancient societies intervened in their cultures. Put simply, these essays emphasize women's agency rather than women's victimage. As such they provide us with examples of women resisting domination by men. For example Page DuBois argues that Sappho's lyric poetry "breaks the silence of women in antiquity" (95). Moreover Sappho's poem on Helen of Troy, DuBois argues, is "an instant in which women become more than the objects of man's desire" (95). Similarly Jane McIntosh Snyder's book length study of female poets and philosophers opens up a new terrain for feminist scholarship on women's influence in antiquity. Unfortunately for the feminist critic of classical rhetoric, however, Snyder can find no examples of women orators in Greece (99-100). Thus, while gynocriticism challenges the well worn argument that women of antiquity were nothing more than the objects of patriarchal oppression, it offers no opening for a challenge to patriarchy from the classical rhetorical tradition.³

The limitation of feminist criticism to ideological critique and the impossibility of applying gynocriticism to classical rhetoric constitute difficult obstacles for feminist scholars of classical rhetoric. Trying to overcome some of the obstacles, Susan Jarratt offers an innovative strategy. She calls for the return to texts authored by men but adds a new twist. Specifically, she seeks to make sophistic orations useful to a critique of patriarchy by arguing that the marginalization of the sophists is analagous to that

of women, and that sophistic strategies resemble those of some feminists. If this analogy holds, Jarratt reasons, feminist readings of sophistic orations could yield new strategies for challenging male domination.⁴ But does the analogy hold?

At least two scholars have called into question the parallel Jarratt draws between the Greek sophists and contemporary women or sophistic rhetoric and feminist discourse, arguing that it overlooks crucial historical differences between the two (Poulakos and Whitson).⁵ Even though Jarratt acknowledges that "the sophists may not be feminists" (39), Poulakos and Whitson maintain, her analogy assumes continuity not discontinuity, similarity instead of difference, constancy rather than change between sophists of the fifth century BC and feminists of the twentieth century. As they point out, we should be wary of ascribing sameness between the cultural productions of two disparate historical moments. They write: "In our estimation, *the difference* between the conditions in the latter part of the fifth century BC and the latter part of the twentieth century ought to be emphasized." I share their concern for the discontinuity between these two moments since I understand difference, as I think Jarratt does, to be crucial to the feminist critique of patriarchy. Phyllis Culham also underscores the necessity of emphasizing historical difference when she writes: "If, after all, studies of women's role and status in the past reveal significant variations across space and time, that is evidence that female role and status are not immutable, biological givens and are open to political renegotiation" (9).

In an attempt to read change over time in the patriarchal relations between women, men and society, I call for a return to the historical emphasis of feminist criticism. But unlike Jarratt, who also reads male authored texts, I seek discontinuity rather than continuity. Unlike the feminist critiques I referred to earlier, I want to avoid reading women's subjugation in the distant past as immutable. Hence, rather than conclude with a reiteration of patriarchy's hold on women, I emphasize the way in which patriarchy changes over time. Indeed, an assumption underlying my inquiry is that patriarchy is not an invariant, transhistorical structure. At first glance, patriarchy does seem enduring. As Lerner points out, "[t]here is not a single society known where women-as-a-group have decision-making power *over* men or where they define the rules of sexual conduct or control marriage exchanges" (30). But to say that patriarchy has endured over time is not to say that its structure and its effects have gone unchanged. Moreover, the point is not to recover the origins of patriarchy; rather, it is to

come to terms with the contingency of patriarchy in the present by recognizing its historicity in the past. By treating patriarchy historically, it becomes possible to entertain the suggestion that human beings have had something to do with its reproduction, and have helped to perpetuate it in its various forms over time.

So it is from this historical point of view that we can begin to read classical speeches from a feminist perspective. We can inquire into the way in which classical speeches represented, constituted, and thereby contributed to the subjugation or liberation of women in Ancient Greece. In this essay, I consider changes in representations of a mythic figure, Helen of Troy, and the relationship of those representations to patriarchy. Another assumption working here is that representations that address gender differences must play some role in the perpetuation of or the challenge to patriarchy since patriarchy presumes a differentiation between women and men as a condition of possibility for hierarchizing the two. Therefore, in my reading of Gorgias' *Helen*, I try to ascertain the extent to which and the manner by which his representation of Helen challenges or reproduces patriarchal relations between women, men, and society. Unlike Jarratt, then, who asserts that "the sophists may not be feminists" (39), I try to explain the forces that limited Gorgias and thereby made it impossible for him to be a feminist. I should emphasize that I do not seek either to blame or to absolve Gorgias from his role in the reproduction of patriarchy. More than likely the *Helen* was not deliberately intended to subjugate women but, rather, was designed as a theorization of *logos*. But if we reject, and I think we should, the all-too-simple claim that it just so happened that he represented a woman in the *Helen*, then we must ask the following question: why did he mobilize the figure of a woman and what were the implications for patriarchal relations of his representation of her? It is only through such a historical perspective that we can begin to appreciate the way in which systems like patriarchy are subject to change. However, we must not confuse the use of history for the purposes of imagining better conditions for women with the misuse of history as an alibi for ignoring the reproduction of such conditions in the great rhetorical works of Western civilization.

I do not raise this issue idly. Indeed more than a few commentators have argued that Gorgias' *Helen*, despite its ostensible goal to defend Helen, is an argument on behalf of the power of *logos* (see J. Poulakos, Segal). For example, Segal writes: "The speech itself, in fact, is as much an encomium on the power

of the *logos* as on Helen herself . . . and thus the *Helen* expresses a view of literature and oratory which touches closely Gorgias' own practice and probably his own beliefs" (102). Judging from the rest of his essay, the two purposes are not equal in importance. Segal sidesteps Gorgias' representation of Helen and devotes his attention to Gorgias' tract on *logos*. In my own reading of Gorgias' *Helen*, I accept the argument that Gorgias uses Helen to make a case for *logos*. However, I also take seriously the fact that Gorgias mobilizes Helen in order to make his case. Thus, my reading tries to make visible the way in which the *Helen* reproduces patriarchy, though in an altered form.

As is well known, Gorgias' *Helen* claims that Helen should not be held responsible for the Trojan War. Gorgias makes his defense by offering four explanations of her departure, none of which constitutes Helen as willing her own exit. According to the speech, Helen went to Troy either because the gods made her, or Paris forced her, or *eros* constrained her, or *logos* compelled her. Given that Helen is the object of forces greater than her own will, so his argument goes, she cannot be blamed for the ensuing war. Though four explanations are explicitly offered, *logos* stands in relief against the rest. Gorgias gives more attention to *logos* than to the other three explanations combined.⁶ Furthermore, the analogies he draws between *logos* and each of the other three forces suggest that *logos* subsumes them. Said another way, *logos* encompasses the other explanations because it shares essential qualities with each of them. For instance, in the line which opens the section on *logos*, Gorgias says: "Speech is a powerful lord (*dynastes*), which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest (*theiotata*, root *theo*, god) works" (8). And later he extends the analogy by borrowing the word for constraint (*anagke*) connected earlier (6) to the will of the gods: "The persuader, like a constrainer (*anagkasas*), does the wrong, and the persuaded, like the constrained (*anagkasteisa*), in speech is wrongly charged" (12).⁷ Finally, near the conclusion of the argument for *logos*, Gorgias borrows another word earlier associated with the gods, one meaning fate of the gods, or, here misfortune: "It has been explained that if she was persuaded by speech she did not do wrong but was unfortunate (*etychesen*)" (15).⁸ Even more directly, Gorgias draws an analogy between violence (*bia*) and *logos*. He says: "[w]hat cause then prevents the conclusion that Helen similarly, against her will might have come under the influence of speech, just as if ravished (*herpasthe*) by the force (*bia*) of the mighty (*biaterion*)" (12).⁹

Perhaps the strongest analogy is the one drawn between *logos* and *eros* (desire, love). Here Gorgias forges an explicit connection between the power of *eros* to arouse intense emotions and thereby compel human action and the power of *logos* to effect real impressions on the psyche which direct action. He writes: "And many frightening impressions linger, and what lingers is exactly analogous to spoken" (17). As Segal describes the analogy:

The pattern is a cyclical one, from physical stimulus to emotional reaction and back to physical manifestation The cyclical process, moreover, is important for Gorgias' conception of *peitho* and for the whole basis of his defense of Helen: an external sense-datum — a visual one acting upon the *opsis*, or *logos* having *metron* upon the hearing — creates an impression upon the psyche which in turn results in a physical action. (107)

In the *Helen*, *eros* thus serves *logos*. It is a way to describe the real, physical force of *logos*. To borrow from Segal again, "[t]he psyche thus stands in a middle position as the impressionable receiver of new emotions and the initiator of fresh action resulting from these emotions; and *peitho* [persuasion], as the art of awakening these emotions, is thus a powerful tool for directing and aiming human action" (108). Thus a bit like the poets' "univocal and unanimous" version of Helen's story, which he promises to contest, Gorgias' defense boils down to a singular answer. By emphasizing *logos* and by structuring the argument of the speech like a chiasm crisscrossing analogically the various possible explanations with *logos*, the Helen establishes *logos* as the foremost cause of Helen's departure from Sparta. More importantly, however, the stress on *logos* renders Helen not just a generic object but a particular kind of objectified entity. Indeed, it is through Helen that rhetoric's power, understood as necessity, violence, seduction, and persuasion, is constituted. Helen is rhetoric's victim. At first glance, Gorgias' *Helen* seems to do Helen in particular and women in general a service by removing her from the origin of the war. If Gorgias' version of Helen's story were to take hold in the public consciousness, the figure of a woman would no longer stand in the position of collective disrepute. However, as Mihoko Suzuki points out, Gorgias' defense is double-edged: "it makes Helen innocent only because it considers her not as a subject who willed her own actions but as a passive object" (15).

When set against pre-Gorgian discourses about Helen, Gorgias' version emerges in the context of a significant break with his received tradition. In the works of the lyric poet, Sappho, and the epic poet, Homer, Helen had been constituted as willing subject or as originary cause. In either case, she represented a real force in her own personal history or the history of the great war against Troy. For instance, while making a case for love, Sappho uses Helen's elopement as an example:

Some would say an army of cavalry, others of infantry, others of ships, is the fairest thing on the dark earth, but I say it's whatever you're in love with . . . It's completely easy to make this clear to everyone, for Helen, who far surpassed other people in beauty, left behind the most aristocratic of husbands and went to Troy. She sailed away, and did not remember at all her daughter or her beloved parents .(5)

According to Sappho, Helen went to Troy without regret and presumably out of love for Paris. In her view, Helen is not only the subject of her own desire but also the cause of her own action.¹⁰ For the epic poet, however, the cause of Helen's action is less clear. Sometimes her departure is spoken of as an abduction, sometimes as an elopement.¹¹ This uncertainty may have something to do with the fact that the *Illiad* begins in the tenth year of the Trojan war, rather than in the beginning. According to Suzuki Helen represents "the putative cause and object of the originary struggle between nations" (1) though her actions are never explicitly recounted. Whether her actions were of her own volition or whether she stood as a mere pretext for the war, she nonetheless serves as the origin of the war and thus represented a decisive force in history.¹²

In the fifth century BC the discourse on Helen shifts considerably. She is neither the desiring subject, whose act in the name of love is to be celebrated, nor the cause of great historic events. To the contrary, she is most often constituted as the object of Paris' actions and as an inconsequential force in the flow of historical events. For instance, in Book I of *Histories* Herodotus writes that Helen was abducted by Alexandrus: "Then (so the story runs) in the second generation after this Alexandrus son of Priam, having heard this tale, was minded to win himself a wife out of Hellas by ravishment; for he was well persuaded that, as the Greeks had made no reparation, so neither would he. So he carried off Helen" (I.3). Then just a few lines later, borrowing from

the reasoning of the Persians, Herodotus' history suggests that Helen participated in her own capture: "to be zealous to avenge the rape is foolish: wise men take no account of such things: for plainly the women would never have been carried away, had not they themselves wished it" (1.4). However, in Book II Herodotus gives a different account, this time taken from the Egyptian priests, which says that Helen was abducted but that her capture had no relevance to the war.¹³ In this section Herodotus admits he is persuaded by the priests' account and concludes:

I believe their story about Helen: for I reason thus — that had Helen been in Ilion, then with or without the will of Alexandrus she would have been given back to the Greeks. For surely neither was Priam so mad, nor those nearest to him, as to consent to risk their own persons and their children and their city, that Alexandrus might have Helen to wife .(II.120)

In this version there is no discussion on whether Helen played any part in her capture. The point emphasized is that her exit, the details aside, was of no consequence to the war. Indeed, any role she may have had, according to Herodotus, was the result of poetic license on the part of Homer.¹⁴ Similarly, in the *Helen* Euripides denies Helen's influence in the war by saying that she never went to Troy but in fact remained in Egypt.¹⁵ Against Sappho's rendition, then, Gorgias' version as well as those of his contemporaries challenge the representation of Helen as a subject. Similarly these fifth century BC depictions undermine the extent to which Helen is a real force in history. For Gorgias in particular, Helen is consequential to the inauguration of the war but only as an object of desire for men and exchange between nations.

The transformation of Helen from subject and force in history to object and irrelevant factor in historical events may be said to coincide with a larger trend in the discourses on women of the fifth century. That is, Helen is not the only female figure who becomes less and less significant as a subject in poetry, history, drama, and orations over time. In her careful reading of the various metaphorical representations of poetic, lyric, historic, tragic, and dramatic heroines, DuBois concludes that with the passage from the sixth to the fifth century we witness a shift from woman as the Earth, a generating force in the reproduction of society, to woman as furrow, a merely passive receptacle.¹⁶ She writes:

In a transformed social world, the earth/body metaphor, which had reciprocally described both agriculture and reproduction, was reinscribed and transformed as well. The emphasis on the earth as an autonomous being — as full, generous, and capacious for production and storage of goods, seeds, flowers, even human bodies — changed to an emphasis on cultivation. The furrowing of the earth, the labor and effort of the fathers who broke open the earth — now seen as more passive, awaiting cultivation — became a primary metaphorical structure. (68)

Thus, the transformation of Helen coincides with a more general shift in representations of women that suggest an altered configuration of patriarchal relations. In both the sixth and the fifth centuries, women were no doubt subordinated by their male counterparts.¹⁷ However, it was not until the fifth century that they were so thoroughly rendered passive in relation to their male oppressors that they only registered as objects when they registered at all.

By reconstructing a genealogy of the representations of Helen set in the context of similar representations as described by DuBois, I have tried to suggest that Gorgias' constitution of Helen as an object does not emerge as an altogether unique event. Rather, it is one more rendering of woman in the context of similar versions. Put simply, reducing Helen to an object was not a singular act. What remains to be considered, however, is the set of implications resulting from the connection between Gorgias' conception of rhetoric and Helen as its victim.

Seeking to revise the reputation of the Sophists we have inherited from Plato some commentators have argued, and rightly so, that the Sophists challenged the ruling elite in fifth-century Athens and simultaneously contributed, however unwittingly, to the empowerment of those who did not belong to the ruling class. Against Plato's accusation that the Sophists were responsible for the moral decay of Greece, these commentators contend that it was largely due to sophistic instruction that many marginalized Athenians gained access to property and the public sphere. For instance Takis Poulakos writes:

Developing speakers' capacity to entertain both sides of an issue, to amplify a subject by praise or deflate it by vituperation, and to make a weak argument appear stronger,

the Sophists offered their expertise in argumentation to the Athenians at a time when public debate played an increasingly crucial role in the process of making judiciary and political decisions. Once acquiring the proper training in argumentation, a citizen could sufficiently represent his interests, put forth the best case possible, and present his perspective in a way that others would not fail to see it. (14)

Moreover, Poulakos argues, the Sophists empowered even those unable to afford the high fees for their instruction: "With the dissemination of texts, which were themselves the embodiments of persuasion and the actual teachers of the art of improvisation, sophistic rhetoric reached its inevitable mission: to make available the potential for self-representation to all those who could read" (14). While this revision of the long accepted view of the Sophists and their rhetoric must continue to be stressed, I wish to pick up on a strand in Poulakos' argument regarding the limits of rhetoric.

Poulakos argues that rhetoric can serve those already in power. Specifically he observes that Sophistic instruction first helped the aristocrats who had property to protect and wealth for instruction: "Naturally, it was the aristocrats who became the immediate beneficiaries of sophistic rhetoric. Still in control of most material resources of the city-state, the aristocrats had most to lose in their public dealings with the rest of the Athenians and the most to gain from an art that had self-representation as its end" (14). Poulakos' central point here is that rhetoric does not inherently empower the disenfranchised. When the conditions are right, it can. However, when mobilized by those already at the center, it can be a conservative force as well.

To my mind, the *Helen* demonstrates both of these tendencies. It demonstrates and theorizes the potential of *logos* to effect human events. Yet it also reiterates patriarchal relations. As John Poulakos argues, Gorgias' defense of rhetoric represents the kind of discourse "responsible for overthrowing the old intellectual regime and replacing it with the dynasty of logos, a dynasty invested with unlimited powers" (312).¹⁸ However even though sophistic rhetoric, and, in particular, Gorgias' rhetoric signifies a shift from aristocratic lineage and property and toward rhetorical dexterity as a ticket to the public sphere, it also signifies the reproduction of male domination. By securing meaning in the figure of a woman, indeed by reducing all the various representations of Helen and explanations for her actions down to one, *logos*, the *Helen* reproduces the strand running through the

discourses of the fifth century that objectified women. Or, said another way, in exemplifying the power of *logos* by making a woman its victim, the *Helen* reiterates in oratorical discourse the general trend toward further subjugation of women.

Even though the reinforcement of that trend in Gorgias' rhetoric is unfortunate it can suggest the possibility for better conditions for women as well. The representation of woman in Gorgias' *Helen* signals a shift, which in this instance went in the wrong direction for women. Set in the larger scheme of things, however, that change makes visible the way in which discursive representations of patriarchal relations between men, women, and society are historical. So, although Lefkowitz may be right that throughout antiquity women were subjugated by men, confined to the private sphere, and silenced in their attempts to intervene, we can find hope to the extent that these forms of domination did not always take the same form or work in the same way. Their situation, sometimes worse and sometimes slightly better, signify for the present that change is possible.

Notes

¹For a classification of studies of women in antiquity according to disciplinary boundaries see Culham.

²For a description and discussion of "gynocriticism" pertaining to nineteenth and twentieth century women's rhetoric, what they call the "great women speakers" approach, see Spitzack and Carter. For a sustained critique and new suggestions for revision of feminist criticism in rhetorical studies, see Barbara Biesecker.

³Here I am addressing a problem limited to classical rhetorical studies understood in the narrowest sense. Although we may not have inherited any speeches by women, we certainly do have access to many other works of great interest to classical, literary and rhetorical scholars alike. I defined "rhetorical" narrowly not because of any theoretical commitment to such a limitation but in order to make the point that feminist critics of classical rhetoric face slightly different challenges than do their counterparts in classical studies. The situation is less bleak for the student of Roman rhetoric. For a discussion of women rhetors in Rome see Snyder.

⁴She concludes: "current feminists are becoming sophists in the best sense of the word by describing rhetorical solutions to the crucial problem of defining a theory with the most power for changing women's lives" (39).

⁵ Poulakos and Whitson's critique is not directly aimed at the essay to which I refer. Nonetheless their critique applies to the extent that they question the analogy drawn between the sophists and postmodern feminists that forms the basis of both essays.

⁶ Specifically, the gods, violence and *eros* receive approximately 43 lines in the English translation whereas *logos* receives 46.

⁷ Compare with the sentence which sets up the possible causes: "For either by will of Fate and decision of the gods (*theon*) and vote of Necessity (*anagkes*) did she do what she did" (6).

⁸ Compare again with a portion of the line which defines all four possible causes: "For either by will of Fate (*tyches*) [of the gods]" (6).

⁹ Again compare with the inaugurating list: "or by force (*bia*) reduced (*harpastheisa*)" (6). He uses similar language in the lines devoted specifically to force: "But if she was raped (*harpasthe*) by violence (*bia*) and illegally assaulted and unjustly insulted, it is clear that the raper (*harpasas*), as the insulter, did the wronging, and the raped (*harpastheisa*), as the insulted, did the suffering" (7).

¹⁰ For an extended treatment of the status Sappho grants to Helen as a subject of her own actions see DuBois, "Sappho and Helen."

¹¹ For instance, Suzuki writes: "The poet only portrays the present Helen and leaves her past self a mystery. He represents Helen as an almost disembodied consciousness passively living the effects of her fatal act. Despite the uncertainty and ambiguity of her identity and nature, Helen, paradoxically, is overdetermined by that one act in her life. And even her role in that event is not entirely clear: Menelaus conceives of her as a victim, and even Priam exonerates her by blaming the gods" (37).

¹² Going farther than my own claim Suzuki suggests that Helen is represented as an agent: "it is only the poet of the *Illiad*, however, who endows Helen with subjectivity and an inwardness that makes her akin to Achilles, the foremost male warrior of the epic" (16-17).

¹³ "After the rape of Helen, a great host of Greeks came to the Teucrian land on Menelaus' behalf. Having there disembarked and encamped, they sent to Ilion messengers, of whom Menelaus himself was one. These, on coming within the city walls, demanded restitution of Helen and the possessions which Alexandrus had stolen from Menelaus and carried off, and reparation besides for the wrong done; but the Teucruans then and ever afterwards declared, with oaths and without, that neither Helen nor the gods claimed were with them, she and they being in

Egypt; nor could they (so they said) justly make reparation for what was in the hands of the Egyptian king Proteus. But the Greeks thought that the Trojans mocked them, and therewith besieged the city, till they took it; and it was not till they took the fortress and found no Helen there, and heard the same declaration as before, that they gave credence to the Trojan's first word and so sent Menelaus himself to Proteus. Menelaus then came to Egypt and went up the river to Memphis; there, telling the whole truth of what had happened, he was very hospitably entertained and received back Helen unharmed and all his possessions withal" (II.118-119).

¹⁴ "This, by what the priests told me, was the manner of Helen's coming to Proteus. And, to my thinking, Homer too knew this story; but seeing that it suited not so well with epic poetry as the tale of which he made use, he rejected it of set purpose, showing withal that he knew it" (II.116).

¹⁵ Messenger: "I say thou barest toils untold for nought." Menelaus: "Herein thou mourn'st old woes: what news dost bring?" Messenger: "Gone is thy wife — into the folds of air wafted and vanished! Hid in heaven's depths, the hallowed cave wherein we warded her she hath left, with this cry, 'Hapless Phrygian folk, and all Achaens, who by Hera's wiles upon Scamander's banks still died for me, deeming that Paris had, who had not, Helen! I, having tarried all the time foredoomed, my destiny fulfilled, to heaven return, my parent. Tyndarus' sad daughter bears an ill name all for nought, who is innocent" (603 -615).

¹⁶ DuBois attributes this shift to a crisis in the relationship between Athenians and the land: "their alienation from their land, the loss of the traditional economic and religious relationship to their fields, contributes to the estrangement of the metaphor. Women's bodies, which were once taken for granted as resembling the fathers' fields, are now seen as cultivated furrows. The anxiety about the citizens' alienation from agriculture may be translated into an anxiety about traditional representations of sexual difference" (65).

¹⁷ As Eva Cantarella has argued, it would be irresponsible to suggest that at any moment in the history of classical Greece, women shared an equal role with men in society: "It was with the birth of the *polis*, then, that the situation changed and moved toward the path that led, in the classical period, to the total segregation of the female sex. The opportunities to live side-by-side with men in certain 'external' moments, to see and know

persons and facts outside the family circle ceased to exist in the seventh century BC. Women were increasingly excluded; not only were they closed off figuratively in the narrow confines of their domestic role, they were actually confined within the walls of the house (in a part of the house called the *gynaecaeum*). A series of laws limited the few freedoms they had" (39-40).

¹⁸John Poulakos is not the only scholar to notice the liberatory potential of Gorgias' rhetoric. Mario Untersteiner and, more recently, Victor Vitanza have also recognized the openings afforded by Gorgias' rhetoric. I am drawn to Vitanza's argument that in Gorgias' rhetoric "something irrational, something new happens" (24). However, I am uncomfortable with the way in which this claim overlooks the extent to which rhetoric can also serve old ways of thinking. Though, as Vitanza claims, there may be over time "[m]any 'Helens,' in infinite regress," in this particular version as in any single representation she was fixed as a certain kind of Helen. Specifically, she was confined to the status of an object. Hence despite Gorgias' ability to create new openings, patriarchy simply would not let everyone pass through.

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